

Guide To Better Living

Maintaining independence in your home

Growing older independently and safely in your own home and your community of choice are common desires for most people. That desire can be realized by planning ahead and identifying hazardous areas in and around your home. Preventing falls and related injuries is key to staying in your home for as long as possible.

This guide discusses how a “Lifestyle

Checkup” and common sense changes around the home can reduce your risk of injuries and help maintain independence. By taking action now, your life will be safer and more independent.

Lifestyle checkup

Take a fresh look at your daily routine, which can be an eye-opening experience. It can help prevent injuries and simplify routine tasks. Preventing injuries around the home involves such factors as:

- Being patient with yourself while carrying out daily tasks - don't be in a rush.
- Increasing your physical strength and flexibility to improve balance and stability.
- Visiting your doctor on a regular basis for vision,

hearing and overall wellness examinations.

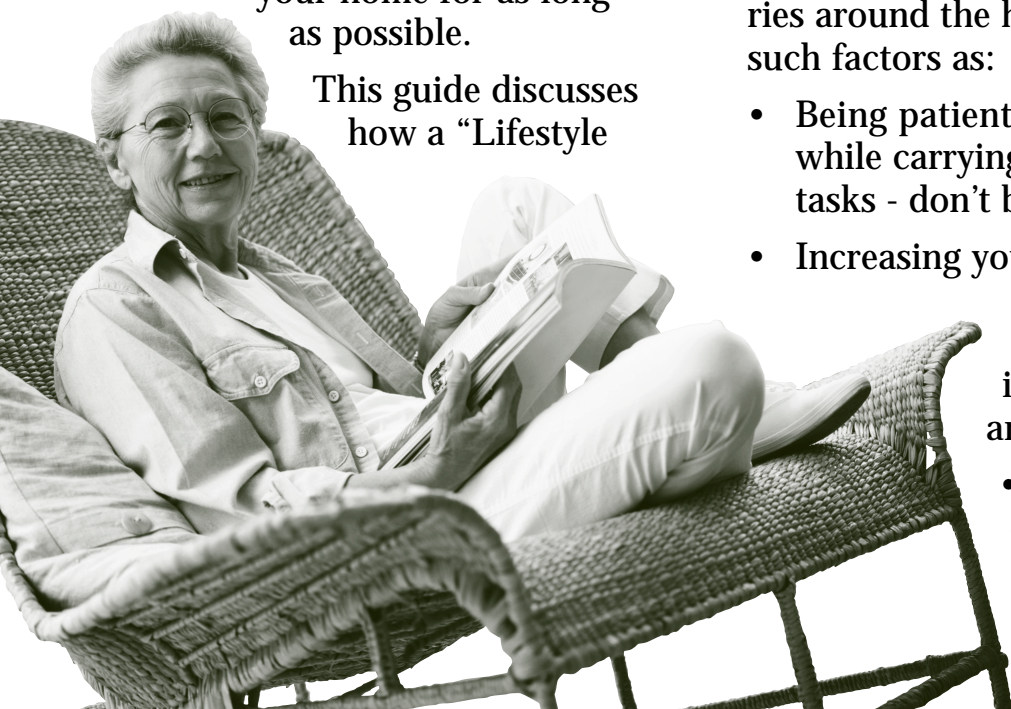
- Reviewing over-the-counter medications, prescribed medications and herbal remedies with your pharmacist.
- Engaging in social support with your neighbors and community service organizations.
- Modifying your home to maximize independence and safety.

By planning ahead you can reduce your risk of injury and accidents and improve your quality of life. Establishing a safe, accessible and supportive home environment includes the following considerations:

Helpful considerations for bathrooms



Injuries occur most often in the bathroom. Slippery surfaces and the lack of supportive



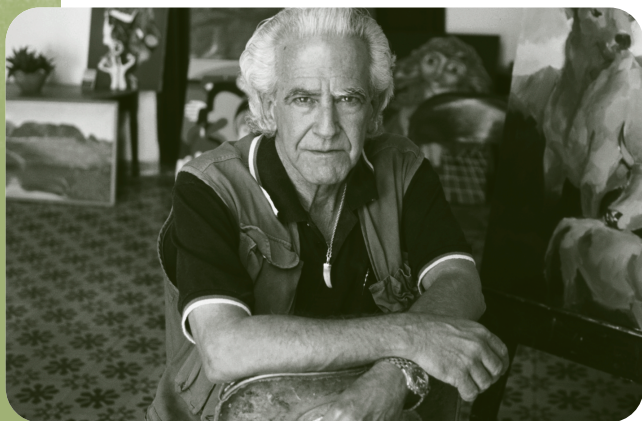
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fixtures, such as grab bars, raised toilet seats, bath and shower chairs, can lead to injuries.

Many different devices are available in a variety of style and color options.

Determine what features would support your personal needs best. Where do you normally place your hands for support? Do you rely on towel racks for steadiness or to assist you in raising from a seated position? Simple and inexpensive changes can decrease your risk for future injuries and increase safety and comfort in your home.



Considerations

- Avoid throw rugs in the bathroom. If you use throw rugs, secure them with non-skid strips.
- Elevate the toilet seat and place grab bars around the toilet area.
- Secure grab bars to studs or backing in the wall.
- Choose among many shapes and sizes of shower chairs, bath chairs and grab bars to fit your individual needs.
- Install an emergency call system or telephone in the bathroom.

Stairways



Stairways are the second most hazardous areas in and around the home. Stairways present risks to everyone, regardless of age or ability. There are ways to make stairways safer and easier to use.

If you have difficulty managing stairs, or feel faint or dizzy when climbing or descending stairs, talk with your physician or occupational therapist about possible assistive devices that can help you.

If you experience fatigue while climbing stairways, place a chair at the top landing to rest.

Considerations

- Place handrails on both sides of your stairway, and extend the rails at the top and bottom to provide stability.
- Check the condition of the stairway; repair loose carpeting and damaged steps.
- Keep stairway free from clutter and objects.
- Place reflective, non-skid rubber material to identify edges of the steps.
- Add a light switch at the top and the bottom of your stairway.

Kitchen



Low-cost kitchen modifications may include a single-control extended faucet, adjustable stool or swivel chair to sit and prepare food, cabinets with pullout drawers and specialty cooking devices. Easier access to commonly used items increases your ability to maneuver safely and easily around the kitchen.

Many types of lightweight cookware and dinnerware are available and can be used with one hand.

Keep in mind that preparing and eating nutritious meals nourishes a healthy mind and body, ultimately supporting your independence.

Considerations

- Rearrange items from high shelves to lower, more accessible shelves.

- Place hot items on a flat rolling cart while walking to and from the table.
- Controls located in the front of the stove or cooktop unit may prevent burns.



- Increase lighting in such areas as countertops and stoves.
- Place a textured, nonslip mat in front of the kitchen sink area to prevent slipping.

Pathways



Remove clutter from pathways in the home to prevent falls and fire hazards. Identify high traffic areas, such as the pathway from the bed to the bathroom, and place motion-detecting/sensing nightlights along that path.

Normal age-related changes that occur to the eyes require increased lighting throughout the home to make it safer.

Well-positioned, diffused lighting decreases harmful glare and shadows that fatigue the eye and hinder balance.

Save energy by replacing incandescent bulbs with efficient compact fluorescent lights that provide equal levels of light. Be sure to use lights when walking from one place to another for safety.

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Considerations

- Install rocker light switches and mount them lower on the wall for easy accessibility.
- Place nightlights in hallways, bedrooms, bathrooms and high traffic areas.
- Increase task-area lighting throughout the home.
- Use motion-sensor lights to provide increased safety around the home.
- Keep flashlights handy - instead of candles - when electricity goes out and periodically check the batteries.

The mission of the California Department of Aging is to lead and advocate for the dignity, independence, health and community involvement of older Californians, family caregivers and adults with disabilities.

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